

**Anwar: Don't sweep issue under carpet**  
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PKR de-facto leader Anwar Ibrahim said further discussion is needed on the Federal Constitution's role in safeguarding freedom of religion.

While expressing support for the Syariah court system, he said non-Muslims should be assured by the authorities that their rights are guaranteed.

"The government must show political will and leadership to address this issue, and not sweep it under the carpet. Otherwise, it will spell greater discord and distrust among our fellow citizens," said Anwar in a statement today.

He said it was crucial to preserve the spirit of the Constitution through "dialogue, discussion and deliberation."

Anwar was commenting on the Federal Court's decision to reject Lina Joy's request to remove the word 'Islam' from her identity card.

### **Guarantees protected**

The former deputy premier said authorities must strengthen the public confidence in the Syariah Courts, and assure Muslims that there is no attempt to "belittle the importance of the existing system."

"As for the non-Muslims, they must be assured that the fundamental guarantees enshrined in the Constitution is protected," he said.

"In essence, while we should preserve the current procedure via the Syariah Court with regards to cases of freedom of conscience, there should be no recrimination involved," said Anwar.

"After all, freedom of conscience is one of the key elements of the higher objectives of the Syariah, the Maqasid Syariah," he added.

He said that unresolved debate over freedom of religion "points to the failure of the government to achieve a broad consensus over the issue."

"This issue has been allowed to drag into an exceedingly protracted and rancorous debate due to the incompetence of our leaders. The solution does not lie with the judiciary as it is not regarded as independent and credible," he said.

"Yet, the government has also decided to stop any form of religious discussion and dialogue that can address these issues. We call on the government to allow reasonable and responsible dialogue to take place to explore our common values while acknowledging our differences," he said.

Anwar also commended Malaysians for maintaining calm over the Federal Court decision.

"While I understand that such a topic can inspire polarising passions among members of

society, I would like to congratulate everyone for maintaining the calm and peaceful attitude following the announcement of the judgment, and hope that they continue to do so," said Anwar.

### **A sense of relief**

Meanwhile, Muslim Professionals Forum chairperson Dr Mazeni Alwi welcomes the decision with "a sense of relief".

"We would like to congratulate the judges who have exercised their wisdom and courage to come to a decision on such a controversial issue under the intense glare of the international and local media, alongside that of interested observers from across the spectrum of human rights and religious organisations," he said in a statement.

Mazeni said he lauds the Federal Court's decision - upholding that of the Court of Appeal and the High Court - that the jurisdiction to change the religious status of a Muslim properly belongs to the Shariah Court.

He described the case as a purely administrative procedure that degenerated into "unhealthy tensions" between Muslims and non-Muslims.

"However this has unfortunately been championed into a cause célèbre for the complete secularization of Malaysian society and to undermine the position of Islam in this country by turning it into a human rights issue ..." he said.

"For Muslims to feel euphoric that Islam has finally triumphed is also misplaced. This is not a battle between Islam and the rest. It is simply restoring things in their right place, of respecting the separate jurisdictions of the Shariah and Civil courts in accordance to Article 121(1a), and of adhering to procedures," said Mazeni.

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